
EQUAL**Catholic Feminist Newsletter for Women
and Men in the Philadelphia Area**

Vol. XXXVI No. 2

JULY 2021 - NOVEMBER 2021

WRITES**MISSION STATEMENT** - *As women and men rooted in faith, we call for justice, equality, and full partnership in ministry. We are committed to church renewal and to the transformation of a structure which uses gender rather than gifts as its criterion for ministry.*

**CELEBRATE THE FEAST
OF SAINT MARY MAGDALENE****SUNDAY, JULY 18****Mass at 9 am****Join us in person at:****Drexel Hill United Methodist Church
600 Burmont Road
Drexel Hill, PA 19026****Or join us on Zoom by accessing:**

[https://us02web.zoom.us/j/
702207300?pwd=Z2tvbjM2RVVpUVhiSmdzK3Z5NHFYZz09](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/702207300?pwd=Z2tvbjM2RVVpUVhiSmdzK3Z5NHFYZz09)
Meeting ID: 702 207 300
Passcode: 111196

(Call Kathy Schuck at 215- 872-1096 or
kschuck55@gmail.com for more information.)

Presentation of the Mary Magdalene Award and refreshments
will follow the service.

All are welcome!

ROOT & BRANCH INCLUSIVE SYNOD*Shining a Healing Light on Fear in the
Catholic Church***5-8 September via Zoom only****10-12 September via Zoom and at St Michael's Church
Conference Centre, Stoke Gifford, Bristol, England**

We love that this is billed as "an inclusive Synod that, instead of ending with women, starts with them"!

Although starting with women, however, the Synod organizers do promise to "return to the inclusivity modelled by Jesus, honoring and empowering all people," which we see as serving as a model for our Church hierarchy.

Here is the exciting lineup of speakers and presenters:

Sr. Myra Poole, SND, a lifetime campaigner for women's ordination, who will open the inclusive Synod.

On Sunday, July 18, we will gather with the Community of Mary Magdalene to celebrate the gifts of this amazing benefactor to our lives. We all know her story – and its misinterpretations – but most of us know less about the actual Gospel of Mary, until the late nineteenth century, a lost apocryphal text.

In July of 2007, the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) website published a summary of the Gospel and its history, excerpts of which we pass on to you as you prepare for the Mary Magdalene Feast Day. We can see in this one woman, the affirmation of the insight and infinite gifts of all women.

You might think that at the very least Mary would be recognized as an apostle - one of the early missionaries who founded the religion - as she seems to meet all the criteria set out in the Bible.

The reason why she is not perhaps lies in another long lost apocryphal text. In a Cairo bazaar in 1896, a German scholar happened to come across a curious papyrus book. Bound in leather and written in Coptic, this was the Gospel of Mary....

One of the absolutely fascinating things about the Gospel of Mary is it really asks us to rethink that story about Christian history: did all the disciples get it? Did they really understand and preach the truth?

Perhaps the Gospel of Mary was just too radical. It presents Mary as a teacher and spiritual guide to the other disciples. She's not just a disciple; she's the apostle to the apostles.

Ireland's Mary McAleese who will give the keynote speech on Canon Law, the Church and Human Rights legislation.

- The noted art historian Ally Kateusz;
- Award-winning writer James Carroll;
- Catholic theologian, priest and author James Alison;
- Campaigner for church reform Miriam Duignan;
- Activist, writer and theologian Virginia Saldanha;

and leading lay woman in the Church of England: Christina Rees; educationalist, psychologist and feminist theologian Martha Heizer; barrister and broadcaster Helena Kennedy QC, and renowned theologian Ursula King.

After dialogue with the hierarchy, religious, theologians, activists and yourselves, the inclusive Synod will agree on four statements and the actions arising from them to take us forward.

You can find more information, including how to register for Zoom sessions throughout the spring and summer at rootandbranchsynod.org.

My Catholic Line-in-the-Sand *By Marian Ronan*

As many of you know, I am a lifelong Catholic. A number of my great-grandparents were Irish immigrants. I did fourteen and a half years in Catholic schools and colleges. I have been a registered member of a Catholic parish for virtually all my life, with a few possible exceptions, as when I was living on communal farms in the 1970s.

But I recently cancelled my membership at the ostensibly liberal Jesuit Church of St. Francis Xavier in Manhattan. I never plan to join another parish or, God help me, give another penny to the institutional church, except to the nuns, who are barely part of the “institution.” Yet I did find a home at this particular parish for many years.

Here’s a timeline of the events that led up to my decision to finally leave:

In truth, I was already pretty freaked by Cardinal Dolan of New York, the head of the archdiocese in which Xavier is located, when he invited Donald Trump, even if he also included Hilary Clinton, to speak at the AI Smith Dinner in 2016. This act was followed by the Cardinal’s phone call last April with 600 Catholics, many of them bishops and the heads of Catholic institutions, adulating Trump. I was so scandalized by that action that his inviting Donald Trump but not Joe Biden to speak at the 2020 AI Smith dinner a few weeks before the election didn’t surprise me at all.

Then, since the onset of the pandemic, another thing that’s been driving me nuts is the “spiritual communion” prayer offered at Xavier and, I assume, at a lot of other Catholic churches. Just what everyone needs, isn’t it, is to hear that their communion at Zoom Masses isn’t real? As if Vatican II didn’t teach us that the Word of God is also the Body of Christ? One of the comforts of this period of Zoom liturgies was when the celebrant at a lay-led Eucharist invited us all to bring our own cup of wine and piece of bread to the celebration with us. How’s that for ordaining everybody?

But the two things that really pushed me over the line—this may surprise you—happened at the Xavier Zoom Mass on August 9 last year. That day was the 75th anniversary of the bombing of Nagasaki. Now the Jesuit Pope, Francis, has stated unambiguously that nuclear weapons are immoral. And thanks to recklessness by some of the world’s governments, the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists has positioned the Doomsday Clock, the indicator of the imminence of nuclear war, at 100 seconds to midnight, the closest it’s ever been since they began counting in 1947. But the Jesuit priest who celebrated the 11:30 Mass that day, and delivered a carefully prepared reflection on the scripture readings, never mentioned the Nagasaki bombing even though the founder of the Catholic community in Nagasaki was Francis Xavier, the saint after whom the parish is named. He also failed to note that the bomb was dropped several thousand feet from the Catholic cathedral in Nagasaki just as the community was gathered for the Sunday morning Mass.

I emailed the priest a few days later to express my distress over this omission. He is by no means young; perhaps he was unaware of the anniversary? He never responded to my email. I thought about all of this for quite a while before terminating my membership but finally decided I had no choice.

I by no means intend to stop being a Catholic. There are several small Catholic Eucharistic communities, led by woman priests or lay people, that I now join on Sunday mornings. And as my husband, the Baptist minister, is given to saying, I will be a Catholic till the day I die, no matter what institutional failure I am currently enraged by: after all, when I fall down and skin my knee, I say “Jesus, Mary and Joseph.”

But I have decided that I am finished with the institutional church, especially here in the U.S., where most of the bishops ignore what even the Pope is saying. I feel a bit sad, but enough is enough.

Marian Ronan is *Research Professor of Catholic Studies at New York Theological Seminary, author or co-author of seven books. She is a long time member of SEPAWOC.*

Save the Date!

“Can the Priesthood Save itself from Clericalism?”

An Online Conversation about a Key Justice Issue in
the Roman Catholic Church

Wednesday, September 22, 7:00 – 8:30 PM Eastern
Time

Featuring:

James Carroll

Richard Gaillardetz

Andrea Johnson

Presented by Members of Catholic Organizations for
Renewal

More information and registration link to come!

Editorial Staff of *EqualwRites*
A Publication of SEPAWOC

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Regular Columnists: **Judith A. Heffernan,**
Marian Ronan, Eileen DiFranco

Mothers and Others

By Eileen McCafferty DiFranco

Just for fun, I looked up the definition of the word “mother.” Interestingly, the first definition was, “to bring up a child with care and affection.” The second definition said, “To give birth to,” and then gave the example of a mare bearing a foal. After that, I guess in decreasing level of importance were: a female parent, a woman in authority like Mother Teresa, and an old or elderly woman like Mother Hubbard. Then the definitions moved out of the realm of people into the world of ideas. To “mother” a movement is to be its source or origin. Mother can also be used to express an extreme example. For instance, a very large ocean liner can be referred to as the “mother” of all ships and we would know what that means. Then, of course, there was the now ubiquitous curse word that often appears with mother. Who would think that word would be in the dictionary. But it was in an editorial last Sunday in the *New York Times!* Omitted from the definitions was Mother Earth or any indication of a mother god or goddess.

Let’s compare these definitions of mother with the definitions of “father” which being me, I also looked up. The first definition is “a man in relation to his child/children” with no mention of care and affection as in the “mother” definition. Another top definition is “the oldest and most respected member of society” or “a word that’s used when personifying or suggesting something old and venerable.” That’s a far cry from Mother Hubbard. Then there is mention of the first person of the Trinity, Father God, the Fathers of the Church, and the title of a priest.

As the pundits like to say, words matter because behind those words are all sorts of images, ideas, and expectations.

What have those expectations been? Robert Frost wrote a poem about two roads diverging in a wood. For women throughout the millennia, there were only these two roads. Deeply creased by ruts made by generations of women on forced marches, one road led to marriage and motherhood and the other to the convent. While a faint trail called “spinsterhood” joined the others in a most oblique fashion, it was overgrown and covered with vines destined to trip up all but the hardiest. At one time, most women had to avoid it at all costs. To be unencumbered by man, either husband or father, was simply not to be.

Of course, once the roadblocks along the once all male pathways were removed by some intrepid souls often at great cost to themselves, things began to change. I’d like to honor this large group of women who walked along any number of these roads on their own terms, in their own manner at their own pace, standing up straight and slashing away vines, filling in pot holes, leaving clues and maps, making the way plain for those who followed them. These women who may or may not have given birth are called mentors. A lot of us would be lost without them.

Fortunately, I had female family members who did not fit neatly into the now largely defunct paradigm I mentioned above. My father’s oldest sister, Aunt Nellie, who was born in 1905 and lived to be one hundred, was older than my mother’s mother. The oldest of eight, she was 18 when my father was born and 20 when my Uncle Jack was born. She often dispelled the widely held belief that big families were happy families. Along with her sisters Anna and Marie who were all older than the five boys who came at regular intervals every two years after them, she regularly pontifi-

cated on the drawbacks of having large families, especially since all of the folks she knew, including herself, lived in small row homes with either two or three small bedrooms.

All three of the sisters from an early age “parented” without giving birth, caring for their younger siblings. Each one of them deeply resented the task they felt belonged to their parents who decided to have all those kids. Aunt Nellie married a Protestant in a ceremony which to her everlasting chagrin, was held in the vestibule of the rectory lest my Uncle Charlie’s Lutheranism contaminate the church. She only wanted to have two children and that’s all she had. She and Aunt Anna, who also married a Protestant, were prophets of ecumenism and religious tolerance. Anna had no children. Their sister Marie had only one child.

Although all these women went to church, all were very leery of religious authority. Aunt Nellie was particularly verbal given the particulars of her wedding ceremony in 1927 and the fact that her very devout Lutheran husband, who wrote to my father every single day for the three years he was in the South Pacific during World War II, had to promise to raise their children Catholic. All of my paternal aunts were pro birth control and openly said that priests didn’t know what they were talking about. Many of my paternal and maternal aunts, hardened by life with too many people in too small a space with too many mouths to feed, also remained unmoved by the dictates of pious priests living in a rectory with cooks and maids. They had their own religious faith, and it might not necessarily been the faith the priests believed in. I believe their faith largely revolved around the Blessed Mother and the rosary because the men in the Trinity, like the men on the altar - and perhaps the men in their lives - were too distant, demanding, and demeaning.

Needless to say, we all saw a lot of each other since we lived in the same neighborhood and so my grandmothers and my aunts rubbed off on me, especially since I loved listening to their stories. I know that I wouldn’t be who I am without each and every one of them.

I was thinking about mentors as I listened last week to a “Radio Times” interview with Nina Totenberg who, along with Cokie Roberts, Linda Wertheimer, and Susan Stamberg, are featured in Lisa Napoli’s new book, *The Women of NPR: The Extraordinary Story of the Founding Mothers of NPR*. While women were suing behemoths like *Newsweek* and *Time* for gender discrimination in the 1970’s, these women began working for little pay at a start-up radio station whose future was uncertain. Their progress was complicated by male opinions and expectations and a disturbing male led plan to pry into their private lives. Totenberg said that when she tried to write a story about college students and the pill back in the 70’s, the first question her editor asked was if she was a virgin, as if that mattered to her story.

The good news is that a fringe movement in one generation became mainstream in the next. Today, we see many women anchors and reporters. Rachel Maddow, Joy Reid, and Kristen Welker who were “birthed” by women pioneer journalists are as famous as the men. And yet, barriers remain. Only one woman has been a guest host on “Jeopardy” thus far!

Women remain guests in the institutional church as well. They are sort of respected for services rendered but rarely for leadership abilities. Ironically also, in spite of the profound lack of women’s viewpoints, ideas, and leadership in the church, it bestows a self-

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Mothers and Others *Continued from page 3*

reverential title upon itself- Holy Mother Church. My Aunt Nellie would tell us that the Church of Rome has been neither a holy nor a good mother. However, there are mother churches out there who serve as a good example of what church can look like and what it can be for people.

One of them is my former institutional parish, St. Vincent de Paul which was humanized and radicalized by our own late Bud Englert when he was pastor back in the early '80's. The parish ardently committed itself to justice issues, but it could not, in the end, risk totally bridging the gender gap. The leadership was not willing to risk all for gender justice.

Our Mary Magdalene Community can, however, serve as a mentor for others. Two weeks ago, a group of us Roman Catholic Women Priests presented a workshop on liturgy to other members of the group. It was moving to see how different communities organically developed best practices in liturgy which fed everyone. Gone is the patriarchal language for God. Absent is any discussion of who belongs and who doesn't based upon clerical rules developed in those rectories and seminaries and bishop mansions staffed with maids and cooks. Welcomed is everyone with no questions asked, no requirements for belonging, and no professions of faith. I often like to say that we just don't care what condition your condition is in.

And when you open up leadership to others, there is freedom to openly discuss once taboo topics in church like childbirth and birth control, LBGQT issues and in vitro fertilization, concerns that are very meaningful and important to parishioners. Who knows? Perhaps our fringe movement might herald the way to birthing a new way of being church that will become mainstream. It will be interesting to see what the next generation will bring.

As we live in that hope, I think we need to remember especially those women who mentored you and helped you become the person you are today. As Elizabeth Johnson put it so beautifully, "We are an intergenerational community of the living and the dead stretched across time and space and comprised of all who are made holy by the Spirit of God." In other words, we are because they were. And those of the future will be because we were.

Eileen DiFranco is a Roman Catholic Woman Priest, member of the Mary Magdalene Community and SEPAWOC Core Committee.

Catholic Funerals and Women

By Jacquelin Agostini

Most people don't want to think about funerals, but as we have lived a year in a pandemic and are quickly approaching 600,000 deaths in America alone, we have to face the stark reality of the fragility of our lives. On Sunday, April 11, the Community of the Christian Spirit based in the Philadelphia area, celebrated a Memorial Mass remembering our lost loved ones. The memorial seemed especially appropriate because I have been busy during the pandemic writing a memoir, and in it I wrote the story of a group of seven friends who came together when I was 22 years old and remain together still. Sadly, death has reduced us to three.

The second friend of the group of seven to die was Kay, killed by a drunk driver. She was a widow with two adult sons. Kay's funeral was one of those experiences that brought home funerals as one of the huge deficiencies of our patriarchal Catholic Church. Most of our group had gone through Catholic School and that had a strong influence us. We knew what to expect. But Catholic funerals were not just another mass celebrated by a priest, but one in which a male had total control. Historically, the priest was even the one delivering the eulogy usually as part of the homily. This resulted in Catholic women who attend mass faithfully having to endure not only a lifetime of sermons delivered by men but having to be sent off into that great beyond by one. In recent years the Church finally has allowed females to deliver eulogies but never as part of the mass. Recently a friend's father died from Covid 19, and the priest made her deliver her eulogy at the funeral parlor rather than the Church.

There are seven Catholic sacraments in the Catholic religion and a book that I read in 1982 in a theology class described them as "doors to the sacred". The sacrament closest to the end of life used to be called Extreme Unction or the last rites. It was eventually changed to the sacrament of the sick so the patient wouldn't be so fearful at the arrival of the priest. There is no specific funeral sacrament, but for most Catholics a funeral Mass is customary as a "door to the sacred". Like most Catholic rituals, however, it is rigidly patriarchal.

Most ancient peoples struggled with understanding the aspects of the world that were out of their control. Many of these were connected to natural processes. Nature could be very unpredictable, and so ancient people found security in the belief in powers greater than themselves from whom they could seek help. I learned that

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Catholic Funerals and Women

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the earliest relationship between humans and deities was probably a two-way relationship with humans reaching out to God(s) and God(s) reaching back to humans. As ancient people grappled with the inevitability of their own death, they created rituals around death of which we can see remnants today in the Pyramids in Egypt built by slaves to house the bodies of the great Pharaohs after death. The people in Egypt considered their Pharaoh to be half man and half God and the graves show how they reached out to their Gods in hopes of their God doing the same to them.

Kay's funeral Mass in the fall of 2006 was far less personal and meaningful. It was held in a Catholic Church that wasn't even her regular Parish. From his faint efforts to eulogize Kay, it was clear that the priest really didn't know her well, if at all. In fact, this funeral Mass was so disconnected from the person we knew, we might have thought that we accidentally arrived at the wrong funeral if not for the familiar faces in our proximity. After Kay's funeral, we made the decision to have our own Memorial Service which was held in a friend's living room. We opened and closed with prayer, lit candles, and shared our memories. It was an enriching experience with each person's memories enlarging Kay's life. That memorial didn't erase the memory of that funeral Mass but it did help us say goodbye to Kay properly.

Kay's funeral certainly wasn't the first time I realized the horrendous sexist deficiencies of the Catholic funeral. After a much earlier funeral that my sister and I attended, I told her that I wanted at least one woman to speak at my funeral to share something about our journey together as women. Most contemporary funerals are not as sexist as Kay's. For example my dear friend Janis died at age 50. She had been a grief counselor who focused on her work with families who had lost a child. Her memorial service was held at a United Methodist Church. This happened before Covid, and so the church was packed, and participants were invited to share our memories of Janis. One after the other after the other, people stood to share a story about her. She had lived her life like an angel who ministered to people who were in the throes of immense grief, and they all had the need to express their appreciation as they said goodbye. I, too, was so proud to have been her friend.

In February 2020, I did attend a different kind of funeral Mass. My Catholic friend Sue's funeral was held at the assisted living facility where she lived with Ed, her spouse of fifty years. Ed had left the priesthood to marry Sue, and Sue and Ed had been a part of a group of married priests and their wives for many years. One of those married priests was the celebrant for Sue's beautiful funeral Mass. When it came time for the homily, he also turned the microphone over to the participants, and again, one after the other, men and women were able to share how Sue touched their lives. I felt blessed to be part of this special send off for my dear friend.

When it comes to Catholic funerals, however, Sue's was clearly not the rule. This is why I believe that Catholics, and especially Catholic women, must plan their own funeral Mass. Thanks to the Women's Ordination Conference which has been a feminist voice for women's ordination and gender equity, some Catholic women have decided not to wait for the Vatican's permission to become ordained. They believe that it is God that does the calling not the Vatican. For many years now I have expanded my Catholic worship to include both these women priests and married priests. I

have joined in Zoom Masses where I consecrate the bread and wine at home along with the celebrant.

And so, I have made plans for my funeral mass to be in the Sanctuary at Epworth Methodist Church in Palmyra and made it clear to everyone listening that the celebrant will be a Catholic Woman Priest like my dear friends Maryrose Partizzo or Judy Heffernan. I want my funeral to reflect fully my life's journey as a feminist Catholic.

Jacquelin Agostini, Ph.D. has a Master's Degree in Religious Studies from La Salle University and doctorate from Temple University. She teaches Women's History at the Life Program at Rowan University.

Discerning Deacons

A project fueled by love and fidelity to the Catholic Church!

We are proud to announce and support the "Discerning Deacons Project" in its mission to engage Catholics in active examination and conversation about women in the diaconate in preparation for the first meeting of the papal commission on women in the diaconate in October 2021.

The discernment process on the diaconate and women undertaken before the actual meeting has become critical. Prior to the Synod of Bishops on the Amazon in 2019, over 87,000 people participated in discernment projects and inclusion of women in the diaconate was one of the more fervent hopes expressed.

And their bishops listened. The Amazon Synod formally requested a papal commission focusing on women and the diaconate, and Pope Francis immediately responded by saying: "I pick up the challenge.... The women have put up a sign: 'Please listen to us. May we be heard.'" In 2020, Pope Francis established the new commission and set its first meeting for this October.

The Discerning Deacons Project has already been encouraging the formal discernment at the local level: "In a listening, participatory and synodal Church, it is a question not only for Synods of Bishops and papal commissions, but a discernment process for the entire people of God." The Project supports educational opportunities and conversations in parishes and communities - and through online witness statements at their website discerningdeacons.org - to ensure everyone has a voice.

Those who have completed this examination and have sent in witness statements, or who are still in the discernment process, are invited to join in a **virtual gathering** with other discerning Catholics just before the papal commission on women in the diaconate convenes in October on **September 3, 2021**, the Feast of St. Phoebe, at 7pm EDT. More details are on the website. The fruits of the conversations from this meeting will then be sent directly to Pope Francis and members of the papal commission.

Synodality

By Regina Bannan

On April 30, 2021, Ellie Harty, co-editor of *EqualwRites*, asked me to write an article on the 2022 Vatican Synod on Synodality. I agreed. On May 21, 2021, the Vatican announced that Pope Francis has changed the date of the Synod to October 2023 and presented a completely new process involving YOU. Francis's ecclesiastical imagination means spontaneity in a place where that does not happen often. I'm glad I postponed writing.

The most startling thing I read is from Massimo Faggioli in *La Croix International*, reprinted in *NCR*: "At that point, [October 2023] Francis will be almost 87 years old. By that age, all of his predecessors on the Chair of Peter had either died (with the exception of Leo XIII) or had resigned (such as Benedict XVI and Celestine V). And if, God forbid, the Jesuit pope should not make it to 2023, this 'synodal process' will have already begun. It's his insurance policy against the possibility that his pontificate will be promptly archived as a quick break before another pope returns to the status quo."

Faggioli hints that this may evolve into Vatican III. Think how unanticipated Vatican II was. I'd be happy with that result, I think. I like "messes" as much as the Pope does.

The most important thing this new process does is involve each of us. In the Diocesan phase from October 17 this year, every diocese in the world is to implement a consultation process in which the leaders, lay and clerical, listen to the concerns of the people.

The Pope made clear that he means all the people, "from the bottom up." In a welcome to the Italian bishops that Cindy Wooten of *CNS (Catholic News Service)* heard because Francis did not realize the microphone was live, he said it must begin with "the smallest parish, the smallest diocesan institution." Francis got real and then maybe unreal here: "This will require patience, work, allowing people to talk so that the wisdom of the people of God will come forth because a synod is nothing other than making explicit what *Lumen Gentium* said: The whole people of God — all of them, from the bishop on down — is infallible in belief. They cannot err when there is harmony among all." Do you take a deep breath at the audacity of this vision reappearing more than fifty years after Pope Paul VI established the Synod model after Vatican II?

What will be talked about? "For a synodal Church: communion, participation and mission" is what Francis defined for the 2022 meeting, but the process is different from any prior Vatican Synod. I am not going to review the variety of what has been done. Michael Sean Winters writes: "What matters now is that the pope has invited the universal church to consider a different way of organizing itself and meeting its challenges. The model of papal monarchy that has been so pronounced in the past two centuries has served the universal church exceedingly well, but the times in which we live, and the sociocultural realities in which the church must evangelize, demand a new approach. Pope Francis is pointing the way." The monarchy model was on the way out well before Vatican II, in my opinion, but Paul VI grasped at it when he felt threatened, and John Paul II and Benedict XIV never let it go. We do need something new.

The official documents result from a classic group process, with dates and goals and responsibilities. I am going to summarize my

understanding of what is aspired to, which is not always what the documents contain. As I said, Francis wants local meetings of all the faithful. Despite the hopes of those who see the possibility of the Spirit acting to bring about a church for the 21st Century, even the local phase is all up to the current hierarchy.

The Diocesan is the first level on the official plans. If the diocesan coordinators are bold enough to have parish meetings, the documents generated go back to them. I am encouraged by the memory of the regional consultation in 1984 in Philadelphia before the development of the USCCB (U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops) pastoral on women. Maybe that kind of open discussions will happen again. Then, the diocesan coordinators can develop texts based on the local input and send them to the national bishops' conference.

In the American case, that's the USCCB, a body that does not now inspire great confidence. Again, I remember the bishops' first draft of the women's pastoral in which many real concerns of women were presented in our own voices. In the synod process, each national bishop's conference is to have "a period of discernment" in which it reviews and synthesizes the diocesan texts. What happened to the women's pastoral is that it stayed with the American bishops and, through three subsequent drafts, the voices of women disappeared and the bishops' took over. It finally was just abandoned because it satisfied no one.

In the case of the synod, at this step the national syntheses are sent to the Synod of Bishops in the Vatican. This step is what's different from any prior synod. This Synod of Bishops is the Vatican office that designed the process, and they have put themselves right in the middle of it. Their role is to discern the commonalities among the various diocesan documents. I anticipate the papal pen in their hands.

Who are they, anyway? You may remember the February appointment of Sister Nathalie Becquart as Undersecretary. We debated whether she would be the first woman to vote in the 2022 synod. But she may have had a much larger role by helping to formulate this new process with Father Luis Marín de San Martín, added at the same time to the leadership team headed by the General Secretary, Cardinal Mario Grech. There is a charming YouTube "Vatican Synod 2022" video that shows all three around a conference table. Then each explains the 2023 synod in his/her own language with English subtitles. Grech himself was a surprise promotion in September 2020. This is clearly a Pope Francis team to handle the synod that means so much to his legacy.

What they will do is draft another guide for the next discussions: the Continental phase. Think about that. What continent are we on? Canada to the tip of Latin America? Just North America? The Latin American bishops already have a strong association, which has generated many significant documents at its conferences from Medellín to Aparecida. It's easier to think of the church in Africa or Asia or even Europe having common conditions and concerns than this vague America, though maybe not for the Europeans who developed this process.

Regina Bannan is the President of SEPAWOC and posts weekly blogs on WOC's The Tablet.

Please help us print and mail *EqualwRites* by donating any amount you can contribute. An envelope is provided in this issue. Thank you!

Book Reviews

***White Feminism: From the Suffragettes to Influencers and Who They Leave Behind.* By Koa Beck. 240 pp. Atria Books/Simon and Schuster. 2021. Hardback. \$27.**

Reviewed by Marian Ronan

The following is a review that appeared in the March issue of *Gumbo*, the newsletter of the Grail in the U.S., part of the International Grail Movement.

It's hard to imagine a more timely publication, just after the one year anniversary of George Floyd's death than Koa Beck's *White Feminism*. Beck is a woman of color, a lesbian, a widely published journalist, former editor of *Jezebel* and *Vogue* magazines, and a Shorenstein Fellow at Harvard's Kennedy School.

I anticipated that Beck would situate the history of feminism in the racist positions held by early suffragettes like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, and indeed she does. But she goes on to lay out in detail the exclusion of women of color during many subsequent stages of the women's rights movement after Stanton and Anthony.

When the much-adulated Quaker suffragette Alice Paul organized the 1913 Washington Woman Suffrage Procession, for example, she excluded any mention of the "negro question" from publicity, for fear of alienating Southern suffragettes. Then, when Black women's groups showed up, she ordered them to the back of the march. And indeed, after the Nineteenth Amendment passed, women of color were still excluded from voting under Jim Crow. And throughout the rest of Paul's career working for the Equal Rights Amendment, she tried to omit all reference to race and class for fear it would dilute the strength of the gender equality message.

From Paul, the author continues the history of white feminism by detailing how Betty Friedan and the National Organization for Women, beginning in the 1960s, focused on women working outside the home, with no recognition at all of women in poverty and how their domestic service enabled such women to get professional jobs. From there, Beck launches into an analysis of how feminism became branded, and the Sheryl Sandberg "Lean-in" feminism—white women in corporate leadership—became the central focus of feminism.

But *White Feminism* is by no means only a history of how white feminism excluded women of color and poor women from the movement. It is also a sort of memoir of Beck's own experience as a journalist, how she, and the subjects she kept proposing to write about, were so often rendered invisible by the very often white editors of the women's publications for which she worked. She noted that those kept out included, not only women of color, but also poor women, transgender persons, and immigrants—the most excluded. I personally learned a lot, particularly from Beck's discussion of discrimination against non-cis-gendered people. I had thought that cis-gender actually meant heterosexual, when, in fact, gay cis-gender men sometimes worked to exclude transgender women from recognition.

The book really does a fine job of showing the primary reason for the exclusion of so many "others" from white feminism beyond a commitment to white superiority by incorporating analyses of both the turn to individualism and feminism as a self-empower-

ment strategy. In the third section of the book, Beck lays out a number of ways to return to the solidarity, the collectivism of the pre-feminist women's labor movements and Black struggles.

I have one concern about the book, however: the use of the term "white feminism." Now let me acknowledge that in my experience, publishers often mandate a book's title, explaining that something like "White Feminism" is much more likely to sell than a more complex, accurate title. But what Beck is critiquing is much more an ideology than a racial group. In some ways, "white feminism" is at least as much the "neo-liberal feminism," the massive turn from post-war economics that Nancy Fraser identifies with the end of second wave feminism during the Reagan/May era, than with whiteness per se.

Beck does acknowledge this in a number of places. And she regularly claims that a change in ideology, not just personal behavior, is what's called for. She likewise refers on a number of occasions to "white feminists and those who aspire to whiteness," which is not exactly a racial category. The title of Part II is "White Feminism™"—"white feminism" as a brand. One of the most striking illustrations of her critique of "feminist" CEOs—"Girl Bosses"—is the story of Miki Agrawal, the half-Japanese, half sub-continental Indian woman founder of Thinx underwear, who worked forcefully for the commodification of feminism.

But in many other places, Beck refers to white feminists without any quotation marks. I guess all of us white feminists are commodified, buying expensive memberships in exclusive women's clubs and wearing high-end "Feminist" t-shirts. Then again, maybe a little more nuance in Beck's analysis might advance the collective action against racism, sexual oppression, and poverty that *White Feminism* is calling for.

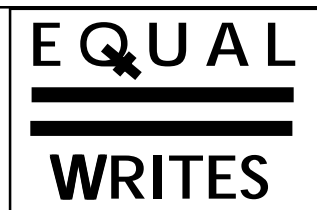
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Scripture Reflections

Summer 2021

By Judith A. Heffernan, M.Div.

In the Church Calendar, the season between Pentecost and Advent is called "Ordinary Time". However, coming out of the pandemic has changed everything- we will never again think of time as ordinary.

We grieve those who died, we honor their lives, we honor those who love them, those who cared for them. We give thanks for the researchers and those who plan, coordinate, reach out and keep moving forward to accomplish good.

We are deeply grateful for the magic of Zoom- grateful for Liturgies where miles fade and continents are one. We have become even more keenly aware that we are one family, one community, bound by love and Eucharist.

This Summer we will hear these Scriptures proclaimed: I am the Bread of Life...whoever comes to Me shall not hunger...whoever eats this bread will live forever. This year we will understand in a new way. I never reflect on the gift of life without remembering James Carroll's account of the day he was on a plane with serious engine trouble. He tells of hearing the warnings: oxygen masks, flotation devices, exits. Joyfully, his plane landed safely, and upon leaving, he said to the flight attendant, "Your life is all extra now!" She replied, "It was all extra to begin with!"

That same James Carroll, whose religious reflections helped form

my faith and still touch my heart on this lifelong road of renewal, has recently written *The Truth at the Heart of the Lie: How the Catholic Church Lost Its Soul*. Reviewers explain that Carroll feels that male clericalism is a dysfunctional, exalted view of the clergy that has led to systemic, generational misogyny and is also a root cause and enabler of abuse crises in the Church. He further believes reform-minded Catholics must dismantle the patriarchy and stand grounded in the spirit of love, equality and compassion.

All of which brings me to the Scripture Reading from Ephesians 5 on Sunday, August 22nd, between the grand Feast of the Assumption and International Women's Day (whose 2021 theme is "Choose to Challenge: Call out gender bias and inequality!") As the winner of the 2016 U.S. Presidential popular vote encouraged: Resist, Insist, Persist, Enlist!

Resist and Insist: "Wives be submissive to your husbands" should no longer be an assigned reading at Liturgy. Persist and Enlist: Support WOC and its "Open the Door 1024" Initiative (womensordination.org).

On Sept.5th the Gospel will proclaim the compassionate healing of Jesus. May we continue to stand with Jesus to help heal the Church, challenge the patriarchy, and empower the mute to speak and the deaf to hear!

Judith Heffernan is a member of the Community of the Christian Spirit and the SEPAWOC Core Committee.